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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000619

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR PCUL SA

SUBJECT: MFA INSTRUCTS EMBASSIES TO FUNNEL ALL CHARITY
COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE SAG

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs distributed a notice
on March 24 to all diplomatic missions in the Kingdom
forbidding direct communication with philanthropic
organizations. Begin Translated Text:

The concerned agency in the Kingdom noticed that some
embassies and consulates are directly contacting charity
societies in the Kingdom to inquire about certain issues and
discuss ways of cooperation with them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hopes that all diplomatic
missions make sure that all correspondence with any charity
society should be through the Foreign Ministry in order for
the Ministry to take the necessary procedures and provide the
required facilities.

End translated text.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: This request is a prime example of the SAG's
unwillingness to give non-governmental organizations the
flexibility to operate without government oversight -- a
long-standing complaint of Saudi human rights activists.
Requiring even non-profit, philanthropic organizations to
obtain permission from the government to meet with foreign
government missions and their associated aid and partnership
programs will further stunt the growth of Saudi civil
society. This clamp down on the relative independence
previously enjoyed by these organizations is a means to
control not only their activities and funding sources, but
also the contacts and networking of the foreign missions
themselves. Although the SAG has made substantial progress
with many of its reforms, there remains a clear reluctance to
allow true freedom of association. END COMMENT.
OBERWETTER